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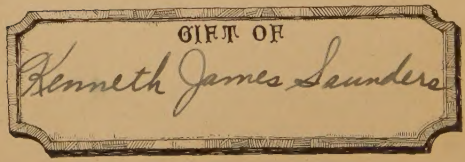
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THE SPIRITUAL MAXIMS

OF

BROTHER LAWRENCE

(Nicholas Herman)

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HEART AND LIFE BOOKLETS. No. 12.

THE SPIRITUAL MAXIMS OF BROTHER LAWRENCE

TOGETHER WITH

THE CHARACTER

BY THE CHRONICLER OF THE "CONVERSATIONS"

AND

GATHERED THOUGHTS

"The simplicity that is in Christ."

NEWLY

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

Nicholas Herman

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PREFACE

BROTHER LAWRENCE is known to a wide circle of English readers by his "Conversations and Letters," and the numerous editions of that collection are a tribute to the appreciation of the deep spirituality of his teaching. It seems strange therefore that so little attention has been paid to his other writings. The "Spiritual Maxims" appear to have been almost entirely neglected; so far as it can be ascertained no English translation has been published since one at Edinburgh in 1741. It is to atone in some measure for this neglect that the translator offers this new rendering, in full confidence that the many who know Brother Lawrence through the "Conversations" and "Letters" will find here also exemplified the same deep spiritual insight.

The "Spiritual Maxims" were published originally together with the "Letters," the editor of the volume stating in his preface

that on running through Brother Lawrence's letters he had found amongst them a manuscript entitled, "Spiritual Maxims, or Means for Attaining to the Presence of God." They deserve attention for two reasons. In a short "Life" of Brother Lawrence, written in 1691, we are told that "he committed his thoughts sometimes to writing, but comparing what he had written with that which he had just experienced in his soul, he deemed it so inferior and so far removed from the inspired thoughts, with which he had been visited, of the greatness and goodness of GOD that often he felt compelled to tear it up at once." Apparently the "Maxims" and the "Letters" are the only writings which have survived. But the "Maxims" are important for a further reason. The "Letters" were written merely to deal with particular cases and difficulties brought to his notice from time to time, and they were addressed to the individual recipients alone.[1] The "Maxims,"

[1] "Letter I." p. 27.

N.B.—References in footnotes to the "Conversations" and the "Letters" of Brother Lawrence relate to the companion edition in this series of "The Practice of the Presence of God."

however, are in a different category. The careful arrangement adopted suggests matured thought, and the inference is not unreasonable that the intention of Brother Lawrence was to sum up in the "Maxims" his teaching, which in the form of letters was inevitably disconnected, in the hope that his message might thereby gain a wider and more general hearing.

The "Character" is a sketch of Brother Lawrence as he appeared to those who saw him in the daily round of life. The author is the chronicler of the "Conversations," probably M. Beaufort, Grand Vicar to M. de Chalons, Cardinal de Noailles. As far as possible, he allows his subject to speak for himself. "Nobody can paint the Saints so well as they themselves," he writes; "nothing can bring more clearly before you this servant of GOD, than his own words spoken in all the simplicity of his heart."

Under the title of "Gathered Thoughts" the translator has brought together a few scattered sayings of Brother Lawrence which have been collected for the most part from

the short " Life " written in 1691. They are only fragments, but well merit being gathered.

Throughout the "Conversations " and the " Letters " there is one great theme which Brother Lawrence develops, the theme which cannot be expressed better than in the words of the Psalmist, " In Thy Presence is fulness of joy." We hear the same melody sounding through this little book—it could not well be otherwise. But is there not another equally insistent on the ear ?—" The simplicity that is in Christ."

H. C.

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I

THE SPIRITUAL MAXIMS OF BROTHER LAWRENCE

"All things are possible to him who *believes*, they are less difficult to him who *hopes*, they are easier to him who *loves*, and still more easy to him who practises and perseveres in these three virtues."—BROTHER LAWRENCE.

SPIRITUAL MAXIMS OF BROTHER LAWRENCE

1. We must study ever to regard GOD and His Glory in all that we do, and say, and undertake. This is the *end* that we should set before ourselves, to offer to GOD a sacrifice of perfect worship in this life, as we hope to do through all eternity.[1] We ought firmly to resolve to overcome, with the grace of GOD assisting us, the many difficulties which will meet us in the spiritual life.

2. When we enter upon the spiritual life, we ought to consider thoroughly what we are, probing to the very depth. We shall find that we are altogether deserving of contempt, unworthy of the name of Christ, prone to all manner of maladies and subject to countless infirmities, which distress us and impair the soul's health, rendering us wavering and unstable in our humours and dispositions ; in fact, creatures whom it is GOD'S will to chasten and make humble by numberless afflictions and adversities, as well within as without.

3. We must believe steadfastly, never once doubting, that such discipline is for our good, that it is GOD'S will to visit us with chastening,

[1] "Conversation IV." p. 23.

that it is the course of His Divine Providence to permit our souls to pass through all manner of sore experiences and times of trial, and for the love of GOD to undergo divers sorrows and afflictions for so long as shall seem needful to Him; since, without this submission of heart and spirit to the will of GOD, devotion and perfection cannot subsist.

4. A soul is the more dependent on grace, the higher the perfection to which it aspires; and the grace of GOD is the more needful for each moment, as without it the soul can do nothing. The world, the flesh, and the devil join forces and assault the soul so straitly and so untiringly that, without humble reliance on the ever-present aid of GOD, they drag the soul down in spite of all resistance. Thus to rely seems hard to nature, but grace makes it become easy, and brings with it joy.

OF NECESSARY PRACTICES FOR ATTAINING TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

1. That practice which is alike the most holy, the most general, and the most needful in the spiritual life is *the practice of the Presence of* GOD. It is *the schooling of the soul to find its joy in His Divine Companionship*, holding with Him at all times and at every moment humble and loving converse, without set rule or stated method, in all time of our

temptation and tribulation, in all time of our dryness of soul and disrelish of GOD, yes, and even when we fall into unfaithfulness and actual sin.

2. We should apply ourselves unceasingly to this one end, to so rule all our actions that they be little acts of communion with GOD; but they must not be studied, they must come naturally, from the purity and simplicity of the heart.

3. We must do all things thoughtfully and soberly, without impetuosity or precipitancy, which denotes a mind undisciplined. We must go about our labours quietly, calmly, and lovingly, entreating Him to prosper the works of our hands; by thus keeping heart and mind fixed on GOD, we shall bruise the head of the evil one, and beat down his weapons to the ground.

4. When we are busied, or meditating on spiritual things, even in our time of set devotion, whilst our voice is rising in prayer, we ought to cease for one brief moment, as often as we can, to worship GOD *in the depth of our being*, to taste Him though it be in passing, to touch Him as it were by stealth. Since you cannot but know that GOD is with you in all you undertake, that He is at the very depth and centre of your soul, why should you not thus pause an instant from time to time in your outward business, and even in the act of prayer, to worship Him within your soul, to praise Him, to entreat His aid, to offer

Him the service of your heart, and give Him thanks for all His loving-kindnesses and tender-mercies ?

What offering is there more acceptable to GOD than thus throughout the day to quit the things of outward sense, and to withdraw to worship Him within the secret places of the soul ? Besides by so doing we destroy the love of self, which can subsist only among the things of sense, and of which these times of quiet retirement with GOD rids us well-nigh unconsciously.

In very truth we can render to GOD no greater or more signal proofs of our trust and faithfulness, than by thus turning from things created to find our joy, though for a single moment, in the Creator. Yet, think not that I counsel you to disregard completely and for ever the outward things that are around us. That is impossible. Prudence, the mother of the virtues, must be your guide. Yet, I am confident, it is a common error among religious persons, to neglect this practice of ceasing for a time that, which they are engaged upon, to worship GOD in the depth of their soul, and to enjoy the peace of brief communion with Him. This digression has been long, and yet, it seemed to me, the matter demanded such. Let us return to our subject.

5. These our acts of worship are to be prompted and guided by *faith*. We must unfeignedly believe that GOD is in very fact

within our souls, and that we must worship Him and love Him and serve Him in spirit and in truth ; that He sees all, and that unto Him all hearts are open, our own and those of all His creatures ; that He is self-existent, whilst it is in Him that all His creatures live and move and have their being ; that His Perfection is Infinite and Sovereign, and demands the full surrender of ourselves, our souls and bodies. In simple justice we owe Him all our thoughts and words and actions. Let us see to it that we pay our debt.

6. Necessity is laid upon us to examine ourselves with diligence to find out what are the virtues, which we chiefly lack, and which are the hardest for us to acquire ; we should seek to learn the sins that do most easily beset us, and the times and occasions, when we do most often fall. In the time of struggle we ought to have recourse to GOD with perfect confidence, abiding steadfast in the Presence of His Divine Majesty ; in lowly adoration we should tell out before Him our griefs and our failures, asking Him lovingly for the Succour of His grace ; and in our weakness we shall find in Him our strength.

OF HOW IT IS REQUIRED OF US TO WORSHIP GOD IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

There are three points in this question which must be answered :—

1. To worship GOD in spirit and in truth means to offer to Him the worship that we owe. GOD is a Spirit; therefore we must worship Him in spirit and in truth,—that is to say, by presenting to Him a true and humble spiritual worship in the very depth of our being. GOD alone can see this worship, which, offered unceasingly, will in the end become as it were natural, and as if He were one with our soul, and our soul one with Him: practice will make this clear.

2. To worship GOD in truth is to acknowledge Him to be what He is, and ourselves as what in very fact we are. To worship Him in truth is to acknowledge with heart-felt sincerity what GOD in truth is,—that is to say, infinitely perfect, worthy of infinite adoration, infinitely removed from sin, and so of all the Divine attributes. That man is little guided by reason, who does not employ all his powers to render to this great GOD the worship that is His due.

3. Furthermore, to worship GOD in truth is to confess that we live our lives entirely contrary to His will, and contrary to our knowledge that, were we but willing, He would fain make us conformable to Him. Who will be guilty of such folly as to withhold even for a moment the reverence and the love, the service and the unceasing worship that we owe to Him?

Of Union of the Soul with God

There are three degrees of union of the soul with God. The first degree is general, the second is virtual union, whilst the third is actual union.

1. That degree of union is the general which one finds, when the soul is united to God solely by grace.

2. Virtual union (which is in effect union though not in fact) is our state when, beginning any action by which we are united to God, we remain so united to Him by reason of that action for such time as it lasts.

3. Actual union is *the perfect union.* In the other degrees the soul is passive, almost as it were slumbering. In this actual union the soul is intensely active; quicker than fire are its operations, more luminous than the sun, unobscured by any passing cloud. Yet we can be deceived as to this union by our feelings; it is not a mere fleeting emotion, such as would prompt a passing cry "My God, I love Thee with my heart's full strength"; it is rather a state of soul—if I can but find words—which is deeply spiritual, and yet very simple, which fills us with a joy that is calm indeed, and with a love that is very humble and very reverent, which lifts the soul aloft to heights, where the sense of the love of God constrains it to adore Him, and to embrace Him with a tenderness that

cannot be expressed, and which experience alone can teach us to understand.

4. All who aspire to union with the Divine should know that whatever can gladden the will is in fact pleasing to it, or at least so the will reckons it.

There is no one but must avow that GOD is beyond our understanding. To be united to Him it is needful therefore to deny to the will all tastes and pleasures, bodily and spiritual, that, being thus detached, it can be free to love GOD above all things. For if the will can in any measure come to know GOD, it can do so only through *love*.

The difference is great between the tastes and sentiments of the will and its working, since the will's tastes and sentiments are in the soul as in their bounds, whilst its working, which is properly love, finds its sole end in GOD.

OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. The Presence of God is an applying of our spirit to GOD, or a realization of GOD as present, which is borne home to us either by the imagination or by the understanding.

2. I have a friend who these forty years past has been practising through the understanding a realization of the Presence of GOD. To it he gives many other names ; sometimes he calls it a simple *act*, or a clear and distinct *knowledge* of GOD ; at other times, a *view* as

through a glass, a loving *gaze*, an inward *sense* of GOD; yet again he terms it a *waiting* on GOD, a silent *converse* with Him, a *repose* in Him, the *life* and *peace* of the Soul. Still, my friend tells me that all these ways, in which he has expressed his sense of the Presence of GOD, come to the same thing; and that the Presence fills his soul quite naturally, that it has come so to pass in this way.

3. He says that by unwearying efforts, by constantly recalling his mind to the Presence of GOD, a habit has been formed within him of such a nature that, so soon as he is freed from his ordinary labour, and not seldom even when he is engaged thereon, his soul lifts itself up above all earthly matters, without care or forethought on his part, and dwells as it were firmly stayed on GOD, as in its centre and place of rest, faith almost always being his companion at such times. Then his soul's joy is full,—it is what he calls the *actual* Presence, and includes all other kinds and greatly more besides. Then it is he feels that only GOD and he are in the world, with Him he holds unbroken converse, asking from Him the supply of all his needs, and finding in His Presence fulness of joy.

4. Let us mark well, however, that this intercourse with GOD he holds *in the depth of his being*; there it is that the soul speaks to GOD, heart to heart, and over the soul thus holding converse there steals a great and

profound peace. All that passes without concerns the soul no more than a fire of straw, which the more it flares, the sooner burns itself out; and rarely indeed do the cares of this world ever intrude to trouble the peace that is within.

5. But to come back to our consideration of the Presence of GOD, you must know that the tender and loving light of GOD'S countenance kindles insensibly within the soul, which ardently embraces it, so great and so divine a fire of love to GOD, that one is perforce compelled to moderate the outward expression of the feelings.

6. Great would be our surprise, if we but knew what converse the soul holds at these times with GOD, who seems to so delight in this communion, that to the soul, which would fain abide ever with Him, He bestows favours past numbering; and as if He dreaded lest the soul should turn again to things of earth, He provides for it abundantly, so that the soul finds in faith a nourishment divine, a joy that has no measure, beyond its utmost thought and desire; and this without a single effort on its part but simple consent.

7. The Presence of GOD is thus *the life and nourishment of the soul*, and with the aid of His grace, it can attain thereunto by diligent use of the means which I will now set out.

Of Means for Attaining unto the Presence of GOD

1. The first is a *great purity of life*; in guarding ourselves with care lest we should do or say or think on anything, which might be displeasing to GOD; and, when any such thing happens, in taking heed to repent thereof, humbly begging His forgiveness.

2. The second is a *great faithfulness in the practice of His Presence*, and in keeping the soul's gaze fixed on GOD in faith, calmly, humbly, lovingly, without allowing an entrance to anxious cares and disquietude.

3. Make it your study, before taking up any task to look to GOD, be it only for a moment, as also when you are engaged thereon, and lastly when you have performed the same. And forasmuch as without time and great patience this practice cannot be attained, be not disheartened at your many falls; truly this habit can only be formed with difficulty, yet when it is so formed, how great will be your joy therein!

Is it not right that the *heart* which is the first thing in us to have life, and which has dominion over all the body, should be the first and last to love and worship GOD, both when we begin and end our actions, be they spiritual or bodily, and generally in all the affairs of life? It is here therefore, in the heart, that we ought to strive to make a

habit of this *gaze* on GOD ; but that which is needful to bring the heart to this obedience we must do, as I have already said, quite simply, without strain or study.

4. Those who set out upon this practice let me counsel to offer up in secret a few words, such as " My GOD, I am wholly Thine. O GOD of Love, I love Thee with all my heart. Lord, make my heart even as Thine " ; or such other words as love prompts on the instant. But take heed that your mind wanders not back to the world again ; keep it fixed on GOD alone, so that, thus subdued by the will, it may be constrained to abide with GOD.

5. This practice of the Presence of GOD is somewhat hard at the outset, yet, pursued faithfully, it works imperceptibly within the soul most marvellous effects ; it draws down GOD's grace abundantly, and leads the soul insensibly to the ever-present *vision* of GOD, loving and beloved, which is the most spiritual and most real, the most free and most life-giving manner of prayer.

6. Remember that to attain to this state, we must mortify the senses, inasmuch as no soul, which takes delight in earthly things, can find full joy in the Presence of GOD ; to be with Him we must leave behind the creature.

Of the Benefits of the Presence of GOD

1. The first benefit which the soul receives from the Presence of God is that *faith grows more alive* and active in all the events of life, particularly when we feel our need, since it obtains for us the succour of His grace when we are tempted, and in every time of trial. Accustomed by this practice to take faith as guide, the soul, by a simple remembrance, sees and feels God present, and calls upon Him freely and with assurance of response, receiving the supply of all its needs. By faith, it would seem, the soul draws very near to the state of the Blessed,—the higher it advances, the more living does faith grow, until at last so piercing does the eye of faith become, that the soul can almost say—*Faith* is swallowed up in *Sight, I see and I experience.*

2. The practice of the Presence of God strengthens us in *Hope.* Our hope grows in proportion as our knowledge ; and in measure as our faith by this holy practice penetrates into the hidden mysteries of God, in like measure it finds in Him a beauty beyond compare, surpassing infinitely that of earth, as also that of the most holy souls and angels. Our hope grows and waxes ever stronger, sustained and enheartened by the fulness of the bliss, which it aspires to and even already tastes in part.

3. Hope breathes into the will a distrust

of things seen, and sets it aflame with the consuming fire of Divine love; for GOD'S love is in very truth a consuming fire, burning to ashes all that is contrary to His will: the soul thus kindled cannot live save in the Presence of GOD, and this Presence works within the heart a consecrated zeal, a holy ardour, a violent passion to see this GOD known and loved, and served and worshipped by all His creatures.

4. By the practice of the Presence of GOD, by steadfast *gaze* on Him, the soul comes to a knowledge of GOD, full and deep, to *an Unclouded Vision*: all its life is passed in unceasing acts of love and worship, of contrition and of simple trust, of praise and prayer, and service; at times indeed life seems to be but one long unbroken practice of His Divine Presence.

I know that they are not many who reach this state; it is a grace which GOD bestows only on very few chosen souls, for this Unclouded Vision is a gift from His all-bounteous hand; yet, for the consolation of such as would fain embrace this holy practice, let me say that GOD seldom denies this gift to those who earnestly desire it; and if He do withhold this crowning mercy, be well assured that, by the practice of the Presence of GOD, with the aid of His all-sufficient grace, the soul can attain to a state, which approaches very nearly the Unclouded Vision.

II

THE CHARACTER

OF

BROTHER LAWRENCE

BEING THE TEACHING OF HIS LIFE

"In these pages you will not find set out a devotion which is merely speculative, or which can only be practised in a cloister. No, there is an obligation laid on every man to worship GOD and love Him, and we cannot carry out this solemn duty as we ought, unless our heart is knit in love to GOD, and our communion is so close as to constrain us to run to Him at every moment, just like little children, who cannot stand upright without their mother's arms of love."—BEAUFORT.

THE CHARACTER OF BROTHER LAWRENCE

BEING THE TEACHING OF HIS LIFE

I AM writing down what I have heard and seen myself of the "Character" of Brother Lawrence, who died about two years ago in the Carmelite Monastery at Paris, and whose memory is a sweet savour.

One, who has chosen to be a doorkeeper in the house of GOD rather than hold a high rank among sinners, who has taken upon him the yoke of JESUS CHRIST, and preferred it to the empty pomp and pleasures of the world, has asked me to write down for those souls, who have been freed from the chain of things seen, what he knew I had collected of the thoughts and precepts of Brother Lawrence. Willingly I obey, and although a sketch of the "Life" and a collection of the "Letters" of this good Brother have been already published, it seems to me that we cannot make known too widely what we have preserved of this holy man. It is my firm belief that I can do no greater service than by holding up this man as a pattern of solid piety in an age, when almost every one puts virtue where it is not, and takes false ways to arrive at it.

It will be Brother Lawrence himself who will speak in these pages. In the " Conversations," which I had with him, I will give you his own words, just as I wrote them down straightway on leaving him. Nobody can paint the Saints so well as they themselves. The " Confessions and Letters of St Augustine " give us a far more living portrait than anything that man could have added. So nothing can bring more clearly before you this servant of GOD than his own words spoken in all the simplicity of his heart.

With all his virtue Brother Lawrence was intensely human; he had a frank open manner, which, when you met him, won your confidence at once, and made you feel that you had found a friend, to whom you could unbosom yourself wholly.

On his part, directly he knew with whom he was dealing, he spoke quite freely and gave immediate proof of his great goodness of heart. What he said was very simple, but to the point, and full of sense. Behind a rather rough exterior, one found a singular sagacity, a spaciousness of mind quite beyond the range of the ordinary poor lay-brother, a penetration that surpassed all expectation. As a man of affairs he was capable of carrying through the greatest matters, and of giving wise and safe counsel. Such were the characteristics that struck the ordinary observer.

The disposition of his heart, and the inner life of his soul, he has himself depicted in the

"Conversations" which I am going to give you. His conversion sprung from a high notion, which he conceived of the power and wisdom of GOD, Whom ever afterwards he sought diligently and with great faithfulness, driving away all other thoughts.

As this first realization of GOD was the beginning of the perfection of Brother Lawrence, for so it has proved to be, it is important that we should stop here for a little, to consider his conduct at this time. *Faith* was the one light he took for his path; not only did it afford him his first glimpse of GOD, but he never desired any other lamp to give him light in all the many ways of GOD. Often he has told me that "all that he had heard others say, all that he had found in books, all that he had himself written, seemed savourless, dull and heavy, when compared with what faith had unfolded to him of the unspeakable riches of GOD and of JESUS CHRIST. He alone," he continued, "can reveal Himself to us; we toil and exercise our mind in reason and in science, forgetting that therein we can see only a copy, whilst we neglect to gaze on the Incomparable Original. In the depths of our soul, GOD reveals Himself, could we but realize it, yet we will not look there for Him. We leave Him to spend our time in fooleries, and affect disdain at commune with Him, Who is ever-present, Who is our King.

"It is not enough to know GOD as a *theory*,

from what we read in books, or feel some fleeting motions of affection for Him, brief as the wave of feeling, or glimpse of the Divine, which prompts them ; our faith must be alive, and we must make it so, and by its means lift ourselves beyond all these passing emotions to worship the FATHER and JESUS CHRIST in all their Divine Perfection. This path of Faith is the spirit of the Church, and will lead to a great perfection."

Not only did Brother Lawrence perceive GOD as present in his soul by faith, but in all the events of life, whensoever they befell, instantly he would arise and seek the Presence of GOD.

A leafless tree he saw in winter first flashed in upon his soul the *fact* of GOD ; so great and so sublime was the vision that after forty years it was as clear and vivid as when he first received it. Such was his practice, throughout life, using things seen to lead him up to the Unseen Eternal.

In his reading, Brother Lawrence far preferred above all other books the Holy Gospel, inasmuch as he found that he could nourish his faith more simply and more purely in the very words of JESUS CHRIST.

Thus it was that Brother Lawrence set out upon the spiritual life, with firm resolve, faithfully pursued, to foster in his heart this sublime sense of the Presence of GOD, as seen through faith. Therein he continued steadfastly, glorifying GOD, and showing his love

to Him in ways past number. In all he undertook, he entreated the aid of OUR LORD, giving thanks after he had performed the same; and, having confessed his negligences, he asked pardon therefor trustfully, without, as he termed it, pleading with GOD. And forasmuch as this communion with GOD was interwoven with his daily labour, and furnished him with matter for it, he did his work with the greater ease, and very far from distracting him, it aided him therein.

Yet he confessed that it was hard at first, that many a time he had been unmindful of this practice, but that, after humble confession of his failure, he had betaken himself to it again without trouble.

At times a crowd of wandering wild fancies would invade his mind and take violent possession of the place of GOD; when such happened, he told me, he kept quite calm, and proceeded straightway to expel them; this done, he returned to his commune with GOD.

At last his faithfulness and patience won its reward, in the possession of his soul by a sense, unbroken and undisturbed, of the Presence of GOD. All his acts, in kind so varying and so multiplied in number, were changed into an unclouded vision, an illumined love, a joy uninterrupted.

This is what he once told me: "For me the time of action does not differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are together

calling for as many different things, I possess GOD in as great tranquillity as when upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament. Sometimes, indeed, my faith becomes so clear that I almost fancy that I have lost it,—the shadows which veil our vision usually seem to be fleeing away, and there begins to dawn that day which is to be without cloud and without end, the glorious day of the life to come."

To such heights as these faithfulness led our good Brother, that faithfulness which bade him cast behind all other thoughts to leave his soul free for unbroken communion with GOD. And in the end, so much did habit become second nature, that, as he told me, it was in a manner impossible for him to turn away from GOD, and busy himself with other matters.

In the "Conversations"[1] he makes an observation on this point which is important; I mean, when he says, that the Presence of GOD can be reached rather by the heart and by love than by the understanding,—these are his words: "In the way of GOD *thoughts* count for little, *love* is everything."

"Nor is it needful," he goes on to say, "that we should have great things to do." I am giving you a picture of a lay-brother serving in a kitchen; let me then use his own words: "We can do *little* things for GOD; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him, and that done, if there is nothing

[1] "Conversation II." p. 16.

else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before Him, Who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of GOD.

"We search for stated ways and methods of learning how to love GOD, and to come at that love we disquiet our minds by I know not how many devices; we give ourselves a world of trouble and pursue a multitude of practices to attain to a sense of the Presence of GOD. And yet it is so simple. How very much shorter it is and easier to do our *common business* purely *for the love of* GOD, to set His consecrating mark on all we lay our hands to, and thereby to foster the sense of His abiding Presence by communion of our *heart* with His! There is no need either of art or science; just as we are, we can go to Him, simply and with single heart." I preserve his words religiously.

We must not, however, fancy that to learn to love GOD it suffices to offer Him our acts and entreat His aid and show forth works of love. Brother Lawrence only attained to the perfection of his love, because from the very outset he had laid stern discipline upon himself to do nothing which might be displeasing to GOD, and because, forgetting self, he had renounced all for His sake. Here are his very words: "Since entering upon the religious life, I no longer perplex myself with thoughts of virtue, or of my salvation. But having given myself wholly to GOD, to make

what satisfaction I could for my sins, and for love of Him having renounced all that is not His, I have come to see that my only business is to live as though there were none but He and I in the world."

Thus Brother Lawrence began by what was most perfect, forsaking all for GOD, and doing everything for His love. He entirely forgot self: he never any longer thought on heaven or hell or on his past sins, nor on those he daily committed, after he had asked GOD'S forgiveness of them. Having confessed them, he no more suffered his mind to go back thereon, but, with the confession, entered upon a perfect peace; after which he commended himself to GOD, as he used to say, for life and for death, for time and for eternity.

We are *made for* GOD, and for Him alone; He cannot therefore take it ill that we forsake all, even ourselves, to find our *all in Him.* In GOD we shall see more clearly what we lack than we could in ourselves by all our introspection; which in reality is but the remnant, unexpelled, of self-love, which, under the guise of zeal for our own perfection, keeps our gaze down on self instead of raised to GOD.

Brother Lawrence often said that during these four years of his life,[1] those years of trial, when no one could lift from his soul the burdening sense that he was lost, he had never wavered in his first determination;

[1] "Conversation II." p. 12.

that instead of vainly attempting to pierce the future, and as vainly dwelling upon the present anguish of his mind, as do most troubled souls, he used to console himself with some such thought as this—" Let what may come of it, however many be the days remaining to me, I will do all things for the love of GOD " ; that thus in *forgetting self* he had in truth *found God.*

He told me that in his soul he had found that love for the will of GOD had taken the place of that which a man ordinarily has for his own ; in all the events of life he saw plainly the workings of the Divine Will, and this kept him in perfect peace, because his mind was stayed on GOD. When he was told of any great wickedness, he was not a whit surprised ; rather, he would say, he marvelled not to hear of more, when he considered the baseness into which sin leads a man ; that for his part he rose straightway to the throne of GOD, and forasmuch as He could remedy such, yet permitted evil for reasons very true and useful in the order of His Providence, he prayed and interceded for the sinner, and, having done so, continued in His peace.

One day I remember telling him without any forewarning that a matter of great consequence to him, and one, on which he had set his heart and long laboured for, could not be carried out, as the superiors had just made up their mind against it. Quite simply he replied, " We must believe they have good

reasons for their decision, and our duty now is to obey, and say no more about it." He did so indeed himself, and though he had many occasions to speak of it afterwards, he not so much as opened his mouth thereon.

Once when Brother Lawrence was very ill, a man of great sanctity of life [1] came to visit him, and asked him which he would choose, if GOD permitted him, whether to live a little longer to grow in holiness, or to receive him at once into heaven. The good Brother never hesitated; he replied that he would leave the choice to GOD; that as for himself he had nothing else to do but to wait in peace, till GOD should show him what was His will.

This disposition brought him to so great an indifference about everything, and to such perfect freedom, that it was very like the freedom of the Blessed. He had no bias; not a trace of self could one discover in his character, nor of any prejudice arising from those natural attachments which men commonly possess. He was beloved equally of those of the most contrary temperaments. He wished well to all, without respect of persons. Citizen of Heaven, nothing could hold him chained to earth; his vision was not bordered by time; from long contemplation of Him, Who is Eternal, he had become himself like Him.

Everything came alike to him, every station, every duty. The good Brother found GOD

[1] Fénélon, Archbishop of Cambrai.

everywhere, as near when he was at the humblest task as when praying with the Community. He found no urgency for retreats, inasmuch as in the common task he met the same GOD to love and worship, as in the stillness of the desert.

His one method of going to GOD and abiding in His Presence was *to do all for the love of Him.* It was a matter of no consequence to him, whether he was employed on one thing or the other, provided that therein he sought GOD'S glory. It was to Him he looked, and not to the work in hand. He knew that the more opposed the task was to his inclination, the greater and more blessed was the love which made him sacrifice his will to GOD; that the *littleness* of the work lessened not one whit the value of the offering, for GOD *regards not the greatness of the work, but the love which prompts it.*

Another quality one marked in Brother Lawrence was his singular firmness of mind, such as in another walk of life one would have called dauntlessness, which gave proof of a noble soul raised far beyond the fear and hope of all that was not GOD. He marvelled at nothing, nothing astonished him or gave him cause for fear. This stability of soul sprung from the same source as did all his other virtues. The high notion which he had of GOD revealed in his heart a perfect picture of his Creator in all His Sovereign Justice and Infinite Mercy. Resting on this he was assured that

GOD would never deceive him, and would send such things only as were good for him, forasmuch as on his part he was resolved never to grieve Him, but to do and suffer all for love of Him.

One day I asked him who was his "director." He answered, he had none, and that he believed he needed none ; for the rule and office of his state marked out for him his path in outward matters, as the Gospel did the obligation of the inner life of loving GOD with all his heart ; that knowing this a "director" did not seem needful, but he had great want of a "confessor."

Those who take no other guidance in the spiritual life but their *particular dispositions and feelings*, who fancy that they have nothing more important to do than to examine themselves as to whether they *feel* devout or not, such can have no stability nor any certain rule ; because our dispositions change continually, sometimes owing to our own sloth, sometimes by the ordinance of GOD, Who varies His gifts towards us according to our needs.

Our good Brother, on the other hand, kept steadfastly in the *Way of Faith*, which never changes ; he was ever constant, for the reason that his one study was to carry out the duties of the station wherein GOD had placed him, counting nothing commendable but the virtues of that station. Instead of watching his dispositions or stopping to test the way

in which he walked, he fixed his gaze on GOD alone, the Goal of his race, and *sped* along towards Him by daily acts of meekness and righteousness and love. He set himself to do, rather than to reflect on what to do.

The devotion of Brother Lawrence, resting on this solid base, was not given to fantasies. He was convinced that such as are genuine are most often signs of feebleness in a soul, which is content rather with GOD'S gifts than with Himself. From the time of his noviciate, there was nothing of this in his conduct, at least nothing was heard or seen of it by those who had his confidence, and to whom he commonly unbosomed himself.

All his days he followed in the footprints of the Saints, along the sure and certain path of Faith. He strayed not from the beaten track, which leads to salvation by the practice of those virtues, which the Church has declared from the beginning ; at all else he looked askance. His great common-sense and the light afforded by his simple faith warned him of those sunken rocks, which one finds in the spiritual life, and on which so many souls make shipwreck, letting themselves drift along the current of curiosity and imagination, of love of novelty and human guidance.

Yet nothing is easier than to avoid these perils when we seek GOD alone. In the matter of religion, what is new needs careful examination, inasmuch as virtue is not of the

number of things, which grow slowly to perfection, but, on the contrary, is perfect from the very first.

Prepared by such a life, Brother Lawrence saw death draw near without perturbation. His patience had been great indeed through all his life, but it waxed stronger ever as he approached the end. He was never in the least fretful, when he was most wracked with pain; joy was manifest not only on his countenance, but still more in his speech, so much so in fact that those who visited him were constrained to ask whether he was not suffering. "Forgive me," he replied. "Yes, I do suffer, the pains in my side sore trouble me, but my spirit is happy and well content." They added, "Suppose GOD will that you suffer for ten years, what then?" "I would suffer," he answered, "not for ten years only, but till the Day of Judgement, if it be GOD'S will; and I would hope that He would continue to aid me with His grace to bear it joyfully."

His one desire was that he might suffer something for the love of GOD, for all his sins, and finding in his last illness a favourable occasion for suffering in this life, he embraced it heartily. Purposely he bade the brethren to turn him on to his right side; he knew that this position gave great pain, and therefore wished to remain therein to satisfy his burning desire to suffer. A brother, who was watching at his bed, wished to relieve him in some

measure; but twice he answered, "I thank you, my dear brother, but I beg of you to let me bear just a little for the love of GOD." Often in the hour of pain he would cry out with fervour, "MY GOD, I worship Thee in my infirmities. Now, now, I shall have something to bear for Thee,—good, be it so, may I suffer and die with Thee." Then he would repeat those verses of the fifty-first Psalm, "*Create in me a clean heart, O* GOD. *Cast me not away from Thy Presence. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.*"[1]

As the hour when he was to leave this life drew near, he exclaimed frequently, "*Oh Faith, Faith*"; this was indeed more expressive of his life than any longer utterance could be. His worship of GOD never ceased: he told a brother of the Community that he hardly needed *faith* any longer to realize GOD present in his soul, for already faith was well-nigh swallowed up in *sight*.

So amazing was his boldness in that dark valley, from which so many shrink, that he told one, who had asked him, that he feared neither death nor hell, neither the judgment of GOD nor the attacks of the evil one.

His words were so full of comfort and of grace that many of the brethren questioned him. One of them asked him, if he knew how terrible a thing it was to fall into the hands of the living GOD, inasmuch as no man, whoever

[1] This paragraph is taken from the short "Life" of Brother Lawrence.

he be, knows for certain whether he deserves GOD'S love or not. "I agree," said Brother Lawrence, "but I should not wish to know it, for fear of vanity: we can do nothing better than abandon ourselves to GOD."

After he had received the last Sacraments, a brother asked him if he were easy and what his mind was busied with. This was the reply: "I am doing what I shall do, through all eternity—blessing GOD, praising GOD, adoring GOD, giving Him the love of my whole heart. It is our *one business*, my brethren, *to worship Him and love Him*, without thought of anything else."

One of the Community having commended himself to Brother Lawrence's prayers, and having begged him to entreat of GOD for him the true spirit of prayer, he replied that there was need of labour on his part also to make himself worthy of such a gift.

These were his last words. On the morrow, which was Monday, the 12th of February 1691, at nine o'clock in the morning, without any pain or struggle, without losing in the slightest the use of any of his faculties, Brother Lawrence passed away in the embrace of his LORD, and rendered his soul to GOD in the peace and calm of one who had fallen on sleep.

Nothing can give a clearer picture of a true Christian philosophy *in practice* than the life and death of this good Brother,—yet another of that band, who from times of old have forsaken the world to dedicate with single

heart their powers to cultivate the life of the spirit, and to come to a knowledge of GOD and of His Son JESUS CHRIST,—devoted souls, who have taken the Gospel as their only rule, and have faithfully professed the holy Philosophy of the Cross.

It is thus that *S. Clement of Alexandria* describes them in the Seventh Book of the "Stromata." It would seem that he had in view a man just like Brother Lawrence, when he said that the great business of a philosopher, that is, a wise Christian, is *prayer*. Such an one prays in every place, at every time, not indeed using many words, or thinking to be heard for his much speaking, but in secret in the depths of his soul, while walking or conversing with his fellow-men, or reading, at the table, when at work. His praises rise to GOD unceasingly; not only in the morning, and at noon, but in all his actions he glorifies GOD as do the Seraphim. Continual contemplation through prayer on spiritual things makes him meek, gentle, patient, whilst strong as iron to battle with temptation, giving no hold upon himself, either to pleasure or to sorrow.

The joy of contemplation on which he feeds unceasingly, without being satiated, renders him insensible to all empty pleasures. He dwells by *love* with GOD, and having seen through *faith* a vision of the *Light of Lights*, he has no taste for what the world can offer. Through love he has attained already what he lacks, and he longs for nought, because, so far

as in this life he can, he has the *Object* of his heart's desire.

He has no ground for fear, inasmuch as nothing in this life can hurt him, nor turn his heart from the love of GOD. He has no need to school his spirit into calmness, seeing that his mind is at rest, persuaded that all things work together for good. Nothing perturbs him, and anger he knows not, because of the love he has to GOD. Jealousy can gain no entrance, inasmuch as he lacks nothing. He loves his fellow-men with no mere human fondness, but as the objects of the love of a loved and loving Father. His spirit is steadfast and unchangeable, for he has committed all his ways unto GOD, and rests on Him alone.

I should like to add to this portrait a finishing touch from the hand of a great master, one who was more illumined by the light of that *faith* which he had in common with Brother Lawrence than by all the science and philosophy of Greece. Will anyone find fault with me for ranking together the great Masters and Doctors with an obscure lay-brother, when one finds in his simple words and life the same full purity and perfection of Christian precept and practice, which the greatest lights of the Church have handed down to us, and which all alike have drawn from JESUS CHRIST, Who hides Himself from those who in their own imaginations are wise and prudent, revealing Himself to the humble and lowly of heart?

No one can be more brave or dauntless, says *S. Gregory of Nazianzus* ("Orat. 28"), than the true Christian philosopher. Everything gives way to his largeness of heart; if one denies him all that earth can give, he has wings wherewith to fly, and find his refuge in GOD. He knows no limits; he lives on earth as a man wholly in heaven, unmoved amid the storm of passions. He yields in everything, save in the greatness of his courage, and by yielding he surpasses those who fancy to eclipse him.

He uses the supports of life ("Orat. 29") no further than necessity obliges him. His only intercourse is with GOD. Raised above all things of outward sense, his soul is a stainless, spotless mirror, reflecting the Divine without any intermingling of what is gross and earthly. Daily he adds new lights of virtue to those he has already, until at length he comes unto Him, Who is the *Fountain of Light*, in Whose Light he shall indeed see light, when the Glory of Truth shall have scattered the darkness of all enigmas in the day of perfect Bliss. In this one recognizes our lay-brother, and all of like mind and heart.

Though it was in a very lowly corner that Brother Lawrence lived his days, yet there is no person, of whatsoever station or condition he be, who may not draw great profit from his life.

Those who are filled with the cares of this world he will teach to draw near to GOD, to

ask from Him the grace to do their duty faithfully, never forgetting that they can approach GOD, when they are most busied, in the market, and where men do congregate, or in the hour of leisure. By the example of our good Brother, they will be moved to render thanks to GOD for all His mercies, and for the good that He inspires them to do, humbling themselves before Him for their many failures.

In these pages they will not find set out a devotion which is merely speculative, or which can only be practised in a cloister. No, there is an obligation laid on every man to worship GOD and love Him, and we cannot carry out this solemn duty as we ought, unless our heart is knit in love to GOD, and our communion is so close as to constrain us to run to Him at every moment, just like little children, who cannot stand upright without their mother's arms of love.

Far from this communion with our Father being difficult, it is very easy, and very necessary for every one; it is to this that *S. Paul* says that all Christians are constrained. Whoever does not practise it, whoever does not feel his great necessity, whoever does not grasp his total inability alone to do aright, is ignorant of his own self, ignorant of GOD his Father, utterly ignorant of his *continual need* of JESUS CHRIST.

No affairs or cares of the world can serve as an excuse for neglecting this our duty. GOD is everywhere, in all places, and there is

no spot where we cannot draw near to Him, and hear Him speaking in our heart; with a little *love*, just a very little, we shall not find it hard.

Such as are withdrawn from the embarrassments and perplexities of life have still greater opportunities of following in the steps of Brother Lawrence. Freed for the most part from the ambitions and conventions of the world, which give to those struggling in its throng most of their cares and troubles, there is nothing to hinder them from taking the example of our good Brother, and renouncing all desire other than that of living every moment of their life, and doing every action for the love of GOD, giving to Him—in Brother Lawrence's own words[1]—the *all* for the *all*.

The example of his complete detachment from the world, of his entire forgetfulness of self, which led him to think no longer even of his salvation to keep his mind free for GOD to fill, of his indifference to what life might bring, and of his freedom in the spiritual life, cannot fail to be fraught with blessing beyond measure.

[1] "Letter I." p. 28.

III

GATHERED THOUGHTS

OF

BROTHER LAWRENCE

D*

"Believe me, count as lost each day you have not used in loving God."—Brother Lawrence.

GATHERED THOUGHTS

It matters not to me what I do, or what I suffer, so long as I abide lovingly united to God's will,—that is my whole *business.*

I am in the hands of God, and He has His own good purposes regarding me; therefore I trouble not myself for aught that man can do to me. If I cannot serve God here, elsewhere I shall find place wherein to serve Him.

The practice of the Presence of God is the shortest and easiest *Way* to attain *to Christian perfection*: it is the *Form and Life of Virtue,* it is the great *Preservative from Sin.* The practice will become easy, if we have but courage and a good will.

The whole world seems to me to be no longer real; all that my outward eyes behold pass like fantasies and dreams. That which I see with the eyes of the soul is what alone I long for, and to be not yet in the possession of my heart's desire brings to me sorrow and drooping of spirit. On the one hand dazzled by the brightness of the Sun of Righteousness, the Scatterer of the shades of night, and, on the

other, with eyes dimmed by my own sin, I feel at times as if I were beside myself. And yet, I make it my ordinary business to abide in the Presence of God with the humility of a useless, though a faithful servant.

Since I first entered on the religious life, I have looked on GOD as the *Goal* and *End* of all the thoughts and affections of the soul. As a novice, during the hours appointed for prayer I laboured to arrive at a conviction of the truth of the Divine Being, rather by the light of faith than by the deductions of the intellect, and by this short and certain method I grew in the knowledge of this *Object* of Love, in Whose Presence I resolved evermore to abide. Possessed thus entirely with the greatness and the majesty of this INFINITE BEING, I went straightway to the place which duty had marked out for me—the kitchen. There, when I had carried out all that called for me, I gave to prayer whatever time remained, as well before my work as after. Before beginning any task I would say to GOD, with child-like trust: "O GOD, since Thou art with me, and it is Thy will that I must now apply myself to these outward duties, I beseech Thee, assist me with Thy grace that I may continue in Thy Presence; and to this end, O LORD, be with me in this my work, accept the labour of my hands, and dwell within my heart with all Thy Fulness." Moreover, as I wrought, I would continue to hold

familiar converse, offering to Him my little acts of service, entreating the unfailing succour of His grace. When I had finished, I would examine how I had performed my duty: if I found well, I gave Him thanks; if ill, I besought His pardon, and without losing heart I set my spirit right, and returned anew unto His Presence, as though I had never wandered from Him. Thus, by rising after every fall, and by doing all in faith and love, without wearying, I have come to a state in which it would be as little possible for me not to think of GOD, as it was hard to discipline myself thereto at the beginning.

O LORD, O GOD of Gods, how wonderful Thou art in all Thy thoughts, beyond our understanding, how profound in all Thy purposes, Almighty in the works of Thy Hands!

All that I have heard men tell concerning GOD, that I have read myself, or perceived of Him in my mind, cannot content me. Infinite in His Perfection, how can He be portrayed, or how can man find words to picture Him? Faith alone can reveal Him or teach me what He is; by Faith I learn more of GOD, and in a very little time, than I could do in the schools after many a long year. Oh! Faith, Faith; oh! marvellous virtue, which illumines the spirit of man, and leads him on to the knowledge of his Creator. Oh! virtue altogether lovely, so little known,

and still less practised, yet which, once known, is so glorious, so full of unspeakable Blessing.

The greatest glory we can give to GOD is to distrust our own strength utterly, and to commit ourselves wholly to His safe-keeping.

O LORD, the sense of Thy love well-nigh overwhelms me. If it be Thy will, bestow these many tokens of Thy loving-kindness on those who know Thee not, to draw them to Thy service; for me it is enough to have the riches that Faith brings in the knowledge of Thee. Yet forasmuch as I must not reject the favours of Thy bounteous Hand, accept my praises, LORD. And, I entreat, receive again these gifts, which Thou hast granted; for, LORD, Thou knowest that it is not Thy gifts I seek, but Thee Thyself, and my heart will know no rest, till it has found Thee.

O LORD, enlarge the chambers of my heart that I may find room for Thy love. Sustain me by Thy power, lest the fire of Thy love consume me.

The practice of the Presence of GOD is of very great service in helping us to pray in truth; it restrains the mind from wandering throughout the day and holds it fixed steadfastly on GOD; thus it will more easily remain tranquil in the hour of prayer.

Life is full of perils and of hidden reefs, on which we shall make shipwreck without the continual succour of the grace of GOD. Yet how can we ask for it, unless we are with Him? How can we be with Him, unless our thoughts are ever of Him? How can He be in our thoughts, unless we form a holy habit of abiding in His Presence, there asking for the grace we need each moment of our life?

If you would go forward in the spiritual life, you must avoid relying on the subtle conclusions and fine reasonings of the unaided intellect. Unhappy they who seek to satisfy their desire therein! The Creator is the great teacher of Truth. We can reason laboriously for many years, but fuller far and deeper is the knowledge of the hidden things of Faith and of Himself, which He flashes as light into the *heart* of the humble.

Nothing can give us so great relief in the trials and sorrows of life, as a loving intercourse with GOD; when such is faithfully practised, the evils that assail the body will prove light to us. GOD often ordains that we should suffer in the body to purify the soul, and to constrain us to abide with Him. How can anyone whose life is hid with GOD, and whose only desire is GOD, be capable of feeling pain? Let us then worship Him in our infirmities, offering to Him our sorrows, just when they press upon us, asking Him lovingly,

as a child his dear father, to give us strength, and mould our will to His. Brief prayers as these are very proper for all sick persons, and prove a wonderful charm against sorrow.

Ah, did I know that my heart loved not GOD, this very instant I would pluck it out.

O Loving-Kindness so old and still so new, I have been too late of loving Thee. You are young, my brethren ; profit therefore I beseech you from my confession, that I cared too little to employ my early years for GOD. Consecrate all yours to His Love. If I had only known Him sooner, if I had only had some one to tell me then what I am telling you, I should not have so long delayed in loving Him. Believe me, count as lost each day you have not used in loving GOD.

FINIS

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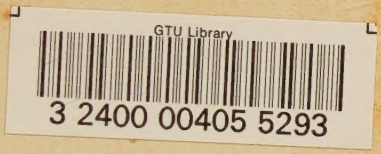

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